

PAUL ELSTONE – MDDC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 28TH OCTOBER 2024
(ISSUE)
PUBLIC QUESTIONS

My questions relate to Agenda Item 10 Solar Farms and Anaerobic Digester Quantity of Sites and Land Use.

General response to the questions raised:

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) maintains a summary of data and locations. For the purposes of the report, we used statistics published by Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) on renewable energy installed in Mid Devon. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/regional-renewable-statistics>.

This data is accredited and is official data.

An interactive map of the REPD data shows the geographical spread of renewable energy projects.

Drawing data from planning records would be a time-consuming and manual task which the Council does not have the time or resource to undertake and would detract the Council from undertaking mandatory, income generating work. This is especially relevant when much information is already contained within the public domain through planning records and other sources.

Question 1

The report says there are ten (10) Anaerobic Digester's in Mid Devon. Accessing data from various sources not least MDDC own planning portal reveals there are just 6 of which only 4 are operational.

These are:

Menchine – Nomandsland
Red Linhay – Halberton,
Mount Stephen – Uffculme
Buttermoor - Loxbeare.

Non operational AD's are:

Willand,
Edgeworthy - Nomansland

Will the report be modified accordingly?

Response: No – the report will not be modified as, as set out above and explained in the Scrutiny meeting, it references data drawn from and published by DESNZ.

Question 2

Of those 6 AD's 3 can be considered as industrial in size
Menchine, Red Linhay, and Willand. Will the report recognise this ?

Response: As set out above, the report utilises DESNZ data. This does not differentiate AD types.

Question 3

The report says the ten (10) AD's have an **installed** generating capacity of 5.3 Mega Watts. Data shows that the installed capacity is far less being 2.95 mega watts.

Will the report be modified accordingly?

Response: The report will not be modified as it draws on official, published DESNZ data.

Question 4

Importantly and I emphasise the total planning consent generating capacity of the operating AD's in Mid Devon is 1.25 mega watts.

OFGEM Data reveals that both Menchine and Red Linhay have been grossly non-compliant with planning conditions going back to 2017 and 2019 respectively. Information that has repeatedly been made available to this Council but which it has failed to enforce.

As a result, towns and villages right across Mid Devon have been blighted by high numbers even convoys of very large agricultural tractors.

Will the report recognise this?

Response: The report relays information held by DESNZ in relation to various energy technologies within Mid Devon. The report recognises that different technologies have different impacts upon the natural environment and residents, and acknowledges that some AD plants in particular do attract complaints or concerns from residents – often relating to vehicle movements.

Question 5

The report very disappointingly says that it is unable to provide details on AD feedstock land usage, or is there any attempt is made to do so. Especially disappointing this given it was the remit for the report in the first place.

Data available shows and again taken from the MDDC Planning Portal shows the land usage is of the order of 1350 acres.

To validate this statement the Red Linhay AD planning condition says that the AD can use a land area of 288 Hectares or 714 acres to provide its 8,925 tonnes of arable and grass feedstock. or an average yield of 31 tonnes per hectare.

Will the report now recognise this?

Response: The report did not contain this level of detail as no data of this nature is provided through DESNZ. Although data could be manually drawn from the planning

database this would be time-consuming and no resource exists to support the work. Undertaking the work would therefore create pressures on to the service resulting in negative impacts on performance and income generating work when pertinent information is already provided through the published report and information is already readily available in the public domain for those wishing to access it.

Question 6

What is the total land area of the solar farms once again information available on the planning site ?

As an example, the planning information shows that Langford Solar Farm covers 60.78 Hectares or 150 Acres and generates up to 49.9 mega watts.

Response: This cannot be answered without manually searching all applications and, even then, information may not be contained. Information will be available in the public domain and the report discusses, in a broad sense, land take associated with renewable energies including solar.

Question 7

How many Solar Farms are there in Mid Devon and where are they, information that should be readily available on examining planning applications?

Response: The DSNEZ data references photovoltaics rather than solar farms. Information is publically available on the planning portal information and is available to search. Information has not been drawn down to support this report owing to the significant numbers of solar applications contained on the planning system and the time required to do this.

Question 8.

What is the total design electrical output from the Solar Farms again information available on the planning site?

Response: This cannot be answered without manually searching all applications. Information will be available in the public domain.

Question 9

Is there not merit in this Council preparing its own spread sheet for easy reference, rather than being reliant on 3rd parties to provide the information and which is not necessarily complete or correct?

Response: There is no obligation on the Council to record this data in this format and resource/funding does not exist to support it. As set out before: the DSNEZ data is official and accredited data.

Question 10

Does this Council have a map showing the locations and land area of Solar Farms, this like Devon CPRE?

Response: No, the Council does not hold a current plan showing all solar farm locations. Other bodies maintain maps of solar parks – although it is noted that these are often at a very high-level and offer little or no detail on precise location, size etc.

Question 11

Where is the Biomass plant located?

Response: It is not possible to answer this as the DSNEZ data does not detail locations. For clarification also: The data refers to a 'Plant Biomass' generating facility, which is possibly an important clarification versus a 'Biomass Plant'.

Question 12

What is its feedstock and what amount?

Response: It is not possible to answer this as the plant/location is not known from the DSNEZ data.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
28 October 2024
Public Questions

Barry Warren – Local Resident.

My questions refer to agenda item 10 which starts on page 57 of your bundle.

In section 1 is a paragraph in italics which sets out what was asked for by Scrutiny Committee.

The report does not answer the questions posed by committee but refers to Government figures which may well be out of date. It makes great reference to a 2018 report, 6 years out of date and prepared for a project that is no longer relevant.

1. Where in the report does it deal with the question as to the *quantity of sites* that are up to date for Mid Devon?

Response: Table 1 of the report deals with “the number of installations in Mid Devon”, which deals with this point – noting that it deals with PV cells rather than sites. The data is drawn from accredited and official data collated by DESNZ (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero) and the most recent data set is from 2023. It is therefore also considered to be current and robust.

2. Where in the report does it deal with the question as to *how much land was devoted to renewable energies*?

Response: Paragraphs 1.11 and 1.12 of the report deal with the exact point of land devoted to renewables energies and, extrapolating an estimation in relation to wind and solar land-take from data provided, the report states; “less than around 0.13% of land is currently in use for either solar or wind power generation within Mid Devon at this time”. Whilst this does not deal with all ‘renewables’, it is considered to give a flavour for land-take by renewables.

Paragraph 2.1 advises ‘*currently only occupy a small amount of land and significant potential exists for further development of new installations*’.

3. How can such a statement be credible when Committee cannot be advised of up to date information as to how many particular sites there are, their locations and areas of land used?

Response: As set out above; the data is official DESNZ data which is up to date (2023 data), the data specifies number of sites (or PV panels) and the report provides indicative figures in relation to land use/occupation. The statement is therefore credible.

Not only is this information not available in the report as requested but the answers to questions in an earlier meeting also support the fact that MDDC do not know what is going on. Please see minutes of 23 January 2024 meeting of Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG minute 47 where no detailed information was given in response to questions.

The current report lacks the information requested and if the Scrutiny Committee are giving attention to renewable energy and the impact on land and the amount of land used then the following questions may also assist.

4. Why is there no reference to the use of BESS [Battery Energy Storage Systems] or SMR's [Small Modular Reactors]?

Response: No request was made to include information about BESS or SMR's and is not included within the DESNZ data.

Virtually all planning applications for solar sites include the area of land to be used and the expected output. These details are in the application, approved plans and, where appropriate, conditions.

5. Why has this information not been collated to give more information and relevance to the questions asked?

Response: As you will appreciate, this information is not available from the DESNZ data and so collation would have to be undertaken manually in-house. This has not been undertaken as the Council does not have the resources available to readily undertake such tasks and much information is already available and contained within the public domain.

Virtually all planning applications for AD Plants include the areas of land to be used for the provision of feedstock and the expected output are given. Invariably locations and areas for the spreading of digestate are also approved. These details are in the approved plans and where appropriate conditions.

6. Why has this information not been collated to give more information and relevance to the questions asked?

Response: This question around information is understood to relate to AD plants and associated land-take as set out in the supporting text to the question. As you will appreciate and as set out in the response to the previous question, this information is not available from the DESNZ data and so collation would have to be undertaken manually in-house. This has not been undertaken as the Council does not have the resources available to readily undertake such tasks and much information is already available and contained within the public domain.

In Section 1 of the report the recommendation is that 'Members note the report.'

7. How can Scrutiny Committee discharge its function by noting a report that does not answer the questions asked?

Response: As set out above; it is considered that the report addressed the original request as set out. The report is necessarily high-level but draws on up-to-date and relevant information drawn chiefly from accredited statistics provided by DESNZ. To draw further data from Council systems would require significant additional time and resources and would risk

mixing data sources. The Scrutiny committee discussed the report at their 28th October meeting and it was agreed to note the report.

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